STREET SPIRIT

Volume 16, No. 02 February 2010 $1.00

A publication of the American Friends Service Committee

JUSTICE NEWS & HOMELESS BLUES IN THE BAY AREA

Marchers Confront the Federal Government and Cry Out for Justice, Housing and Human Rights

Story and photos by Carol Harvey



A large protest was held on January 20 in San Francisco to demand housing and an end to police abuse. Photos by Carol Harvey

The "Where's Our Change?" march held in San Francisco on January 20 felt a little like Mardi Gras on a rainy, windy day. Despite the gusty weather, the crowd's mood was upbeat. Beneath blowing Embarcadero palm trees, nearly one thousand protesters marched from Justin Herman Plaza. They bisected the Market Street bank and business district, paraded to the Federal Building on Mission, and finally arrived at the Civic Center.

At Justin Herman Plaza, James Chinosini, a community organizer with Planning for Elders in the Central City, warmed up an energetic crowd of hundreds of homeless, senior, disabled, low- and middle-income demonstrators, as well as affordable-housing advocates and supporters from Berkeley, Oakland, Sacramento, Seattle, Portland, Los Angeles and Philadelphia. The marchers chanted with Chionsini:

"Housing is a human right.
We demand our homes tonight.
Every child deserves a home.
Even after they are grown."

The march built on a movement dedicated to clarifying the causes of homelessness, fighting for jobs and affordable housing, and resisting the criminalization of poverty. It was organized under the umbrella of Western Regional Advocacy Project (WRAP), a coalition of West Coast housing activists including Building Opportunities for Self-Sufficiency (BOSS); San Francisco's Coalition on Homelessness; Los Angeles Community Action Network; Portland-based Sisters Of The Road; Portland's *Street Roots* newspaper; and *Street Spirit*, an Oakland publication of the American Friends Service Committee.

The march was timed for President Obama's one-year inaugural anniversary. A sea of signs asking, "Obama, where's our change?" waved in the air.

On the day of the march, in the *San Francisco Chronicle's* commentary section, WRAP Director Paul Boden wrote,

"During President Barack Obama's first year in office, we learned that change could come very quickly when a financial crisis was imminent, but what about the tens of millions in human crisis? Our change is still rattling in the bottom of our cups."

Boden outlined the growing dimensions of poverty and homelessness facing the Obama administration. "Almost 40 million Americans now live below the poverty line, with 43 percent of them in deep poverty. Homelessness increased 12 percent from 2007 to 2008 in cities across the country. More people are being pushed into the street. If ever this country has seen a need for change, it is now. Affordable housing is the only solution to ending homelessness."

After the neoconservative Bush administration began to dismantle the Constitution, Americans voted in Obama to bring fundamental structural change, restore representative democracy and eliminate the root causes of unemployment, poverty and homelessness.

The following week after the protesters marched in San Francisco, in his State of the Union address on January 27, Obama recalled his campaign slogan promising change, reminding the deeply disappointed that he "never suggested change would be easy." Following his dubious attempt to resuscitate the economy by pumping billions in taxpayer dollars into "too big to fail" banks and expanding two wars in the Middle East, Obama correctly surmised many Americans doubt he will deliver.

At Justin Herman Plaza, a man held a sign saying, "Foolish Spending Makes No 'Cents.'" Cheri Honkala, director of the Philadelphia-based Poor People's Economic and Human Rights Campaign, told the rally that she "cried and was overjoyed to see the very first African-American President." That went downhill "when he allocated more soldiers to Afghanistan instead of providing decent affordable housing in this country."

Back on Feb. 5, 2008, Obama brilliantly offered, "Change will not come if we wait for some other person or some other time. We are the ones we've been waiting for. We are the change that we seek."

A year later, WRAP supporters transmuted their bitter disappointment into assertive action, making "Where's Our Change?" the demonstration's watchword.



"Where's Our Change?" became the watchword of the demonstration. The WRAP protest signs were held by Yvette Hockberg *(at left)* and Lindsay Parkinson.

Masses of marchers stormed Market Street chanting, singing, and dancing to exquisitely syncopated rhythms and New Orleans-style beats of the Brass Liberation Orchestra's thumping drum, blaring brass, trumpeting tuba, clinking cowbell, rattling tambourine. One joyful dancer executed intricate steps, whirling like a dervish, gyrating between moving bodies. Massed voices rose over the music shouting as one.

As the crowd surged down Market, the rolling din penetrated bank lobbies. Managers and tellers heard their chant: "Banks got bailed out. We got sold out."

All the while, bullhorns blared, "What Do we Want? Housing.

When do we want it? Now!"

Rows of signs waved overhead, brightening gray skies.

"Housing Is A Human Right."
"Stop Criminalizing Poverty."
"House Keys Not Handouts."

The message of the demonstrators to the downtown business district was clear. On the one-year anniversary of the president, protesters had taken over this street in the name of justice for all the people. In recent years, the most powerful San Francisco businesses have attempted to take over these same streets by using the police and private security forces hired by Business Improvement Districts to banish the homeless, disabled and visibly poor.

Today, protesters were using nothing but the power of nonviolence to open the streets for all. National Lawyer's Guild observers were watching the protesters and the police, and nonviolent Peace Patrols marched among the rally to ensure "domestic tranquility."

Homeless people and housing activists were marching to say they will no longer tolerate being marginalized, isolated by stereotype, or swept by "security" like trash from Business Improvement Districts. "We are not throw-away people to be warehoused out of your uneasy sight in bug-infested shelters," said one protester.

From the gentrified urban centers — New York and Seattle, Atlanta, Dallas, Cincinnati, to Minneapolis and Los Angeles — protesters came to let the cold reality of the nation's embarrassing poverty unsettle the tourists. By making poverty visible, the demonstrators hoped that people will begin to ponder what forces broke the social structure and question their role in it. Especially as they lose their homes,

See **March for Justice** *page 8*

Berkeley Public Housing Tenants Demand Resignations

Poor tenants warn that plans to privatize and sell public housing will lead to their displacement.

by Lynda Carson

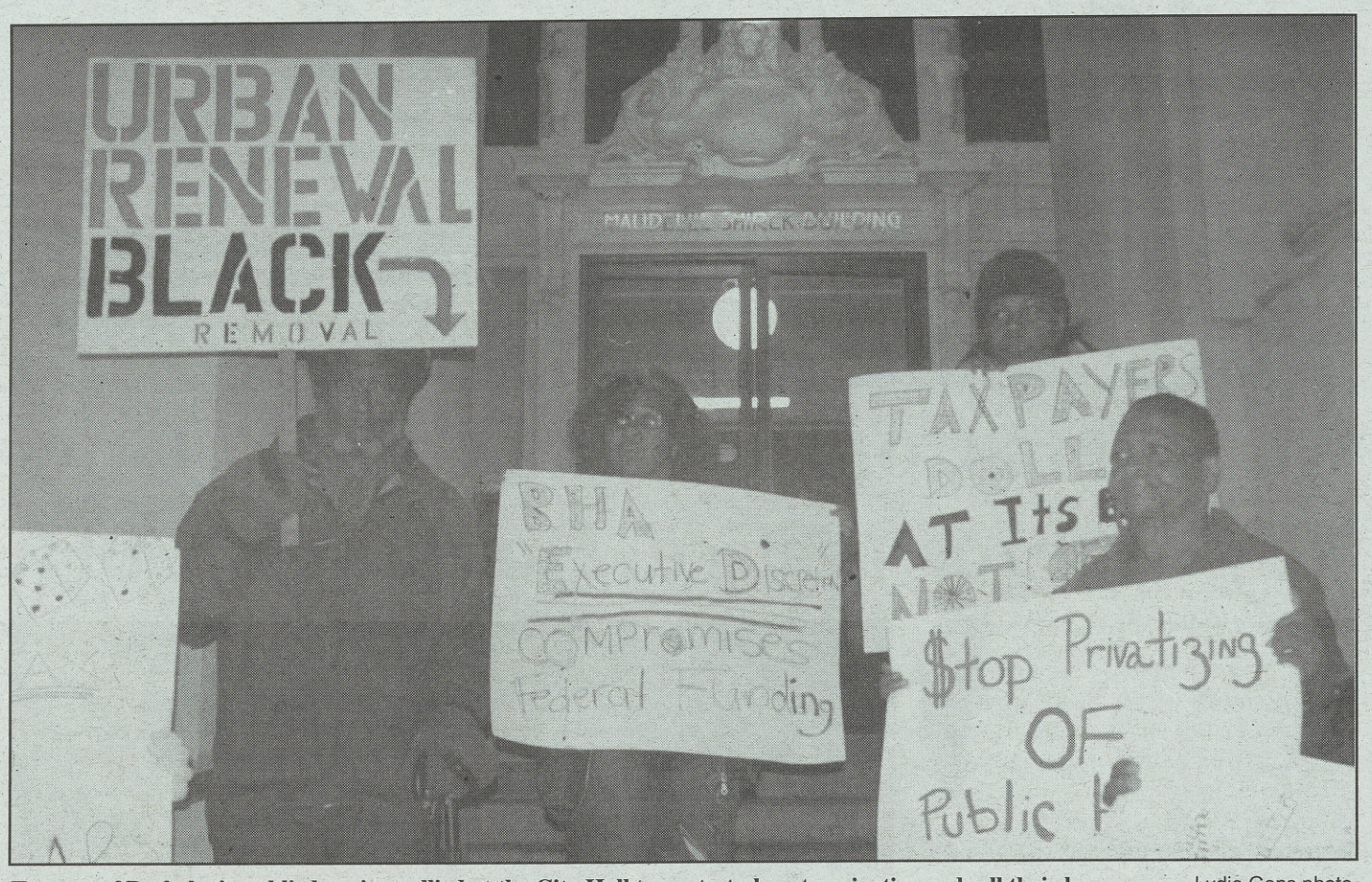
Public housing and Section 8 tenants appeared at the Berkeley City Council meeting on January 19 to speak out against alleged illegal activities of the Berkeley Housing Authority (BHA), and its plan to privatize and sell 75 public housing units to an unnamed nonprofit housing developer.

Despite the harsh rainstorms pounding the Bay Area, tenants held protest signs in front of Berkeley's Old City Hall on Tuesday evening, before stepping into the City Council meeting to demand the resignation of BHA Director Tia Ingram, and a few BHA board members involved in the plan to sell public housing units built as recently as the mid-1980s. The residents face displacement from their housing and homelessness, as a result.

Public housing provides housing to poor people on Social Security, General Assistance, SSI, the Cal-Works program and others with no income at all. Tenants are concerned that if the housing is privatized and sold to a nonprofit housing agency, they may be victimized and face discrimination because nonprofit housing agencies have minimum-income requirements that disqualify many poor people from residing in their housing projects.

Many low-income tenants spoke before the City Council, including Keith Carlisle, Zsanna Secreas, Penelope McKinney, Tequoia Nickson and Rose Flippin. They spoke out passionately against BHA policies and denounced alleged wrongdoing by BHA staff, while stating that 209 low-income residents are affected by the BHA's poor behavior, inadequate housing that has been allowed to deteriorate, infestations of bugs and cockroaches, and actions that have unlawfully tossed Section 8 tenants out of the housing program.

Rose Flippen said, "We are opposed to the selling of our public housing, and are calling for a full investigation into the activities of BHA Director Tia Ingram, and some board members, including BHA chairperson Carole Norris, for mismanagement of Berkeley's public housing program and the lack of repairs to our housing."



Tenants of Berkeley's public housing rallied at the City Hall to protest plans to privatize and sell their homes. Lydia Gans photo

Penelope McKinney stated that she feels victimized. She said, "I was terminated from Berkeley's Section 8 program around a year ago and was accused of filing my papers too late when I tried to renew my contract, and was never given a grievance hearing to appeal the decision. I have a severely handicapped son, and have never been so frightened in my life of becoming homeless."

Homelessness is on the rise nationwide due to budget cuts and a failed economy. Recently the National Health Care for the Homeless Council reported that the average age of death for homeless people is around 50 years, compared to about 78 years for non-homeless Americans.

"We have problems with deferred maintenance, and want to preserve our public housing," Tequoia Nickson said, "because affordable housing is not as affordable as the nonprofit developers want the public to believe. I have a family of four, and we hope to save public housing."

Public housing tenant Keith Carlisle said, "Now that the mismanagement of the BHA administration and its board are being called into question by HUD, the BHA director and board want to sell off the problem that they have created. We say no! We say you messed up and you must take responsibility and clean it up. We want a new business model that places us, the tenants, in partnership with BHA and HUD." Carlisle then called for the BHA board to be recalled, and told the City Council that serious ethical breaches had been committed by the BHA board members and director.

"In closing," said Carlisle, "we ask that you recall the board that you created. We believe that a conflict of interest exists. Ms. Carole Norris, Chair of the Board of the Berkeley Housing Authority, works for ICF Consultants. We understand that this company is a paid consulting firm hired by the City of Berkeley for advice. Part of this company's mission is helping to provide 'affordable housing strategies.' We don't feel that Ms. Norris has our best interest in mind. She is a major advocate for privatizing our family homes.

"We also ask that you fire Ms. Tia Ingram, the executive director of BHA. She has committed several illegal acts. She has closed the waiting list so that public housing tenants who wished to move could not do so without losing their subsidy. Secondly, she continues to retaliate against tenants who exercise their rights as they relate to habitability issues in their units. We have had enough of her and her intimidation tactics.

"We ask you, the City Council, to retake the roles of commissioners and help us to save our public housing. Disposing of public housing is not a viable option, and public housing needs to be here for current and future generations of poor people needing low-income housing, regardless of their income."

City Councilman Max Anderson stated that he is concerned about the tenants' complaints, and said he knows that when so many come forward to speak out publicly, that something must be seriously wrong in the housing authority.

City Councilman Kriss Worthington also has supported the public housing tenants in their opposition to the sell-off of public housing, and the tenants will continue to try and get on an agenda item at a future City Council meeting, in order to voice their full concerns.

The public housing residents invite the public to join them in the struggle to save Berkeley's public housing by coming to their weekly meetings on Saturday mornings from 10 a.m. to noon at Intercity Services, 3269 Adeline Street in Berkeley.

Federal Stimulus Undermined by Economic Racism

Only by targeting the communities pushed backwards by historic racial injustice will recovery efforts reach everyone.

by Ajamu Dillahunt

From the stern way that President Barack Obama dismissed the Congressional Black Caucus last month, you'd think the CBC had insisted that every last dollar of job-creation money go to African Americans.

And from the way some conservative pundits responded (columnist Michelle Malkin, for instance, called it a "shake down"), you'd think the CBC had demanded that the Secret Service round up white folks and force them to empty their bank accounts and hand the money over to black folks.

But of course they didn't. The Congressional Black Caucus made the very reasonable suggestion that 10 percent of the stimulus be targeted to the poorest urban areas, where so many African Americans live. Given that African Americans are about 13 percent of the U.S. population, 10 percent is a pretty modest request.

Yes, people of all races are suffering mightily in the Great Recession, the worst in 25 years. One in eight families receives food stamps now. But as our grandmothers used to say, when whites catch a cold, Blacks catch pneumonia. December's white unemployment rate of 9 percent is bad, though better than November's. But the Black and Latino rates jumped to the devastating levels of 16.2 percent and 12.9 percent, a 27-year high.

Families survive unemployment better or worse depending on how much of a cushion they have. African American and Latino families entered the recession with a dangerously low median net worth, according to a new report by United for a Fair Economy, "The State of the Dream 2010."

In 2007, the typical Black household had a net worth of $17,100; the typical Latino family had $21,000; and the typical white family had $170,400. In other words, Blacks had a dime of assets for every white dollar.

African Americans have gotten less than their share of every federal benefit since the Homestead Act handed out land to white settlers in 1865; since Social Security was set up to exclude domestic and agricultural workers; and since the Urban Renewal program of the 1960s was nicknamed "Negro Removal" because it replaced torn-down white apartments but rarely black apartments.

But with the first Black president, and with a Democratic majority swept into office by high Black voter turn-out, we would expect better than this tilt to the white. It goes without saying that the recent Wall Street bailout saved the jobs of a bunch of rich white men. And, of course, letting the estate tax expire was a big giveaway to mostly white multimillionaire heirs, since African Americans are 34 times less likely to die with the $3.5 million needed to trigger that most progressive of all taxes.

But even the aid for Main Street favors less-needy whites. By asking states for "shovel-ready" infrastructure projects, President Obama steered the money towards laid-off construction workers, disproportionately white men who recently had good jobs, rather than to human services and other more diverse occupations.

The Associated Press reviewed more than 5,500 transportation projects using federal stimulus money, and found that 50 percent more per person will be spent in the places of lowest unemployment than in the communities that need the jobs most.

By boycotting a key Financial Services Committee vote, the CBC got $6 billion for Black communities added to two bills. Six billion may sound like a lot of money, but it's just one percent the size of the TARP financial bailout.

When Obama didn't refuse Van Jones' resignation, when he didn't contest the

See **Federal Stimulus** *page 7*

Democrats Are Fueling Right-Wing Populism

In the struggle over health care, leading Democrats have demoralized their own base. In the process, they've fueled right-wing populism.

by Norman Solomon

In his triumphant speech on election night, Scott Brown, the newly elected Republican senator from Massachusetts, should have thanked top Democrats in Washington for all they did to make his victory possible.

For a year now, leading Democrats have steadily embraced more corporate formulas for "healthcare reform." In the name of political realism, they have demobilized and demoralized the Democratic base. In the process, they've fueled right-wing populism.

The Democratic leadership on healthcare and so much else — including bank bailouts, financial services, foreclosures and foreign policy — has been so corporate that Republicans have found it easy to play populist. Fixated on passage of something that could be called "healthcare reform," the Democratic establishment has propagated the myth that enacting such a law is vital to the political viability of the Obama presidency.

With few exceptions, the most progressive members of Congress have twisted themselves into knots to move with the choreography from the White House. The worse the healthcare bill got, the more they strained to lavish incongruous praise on it.

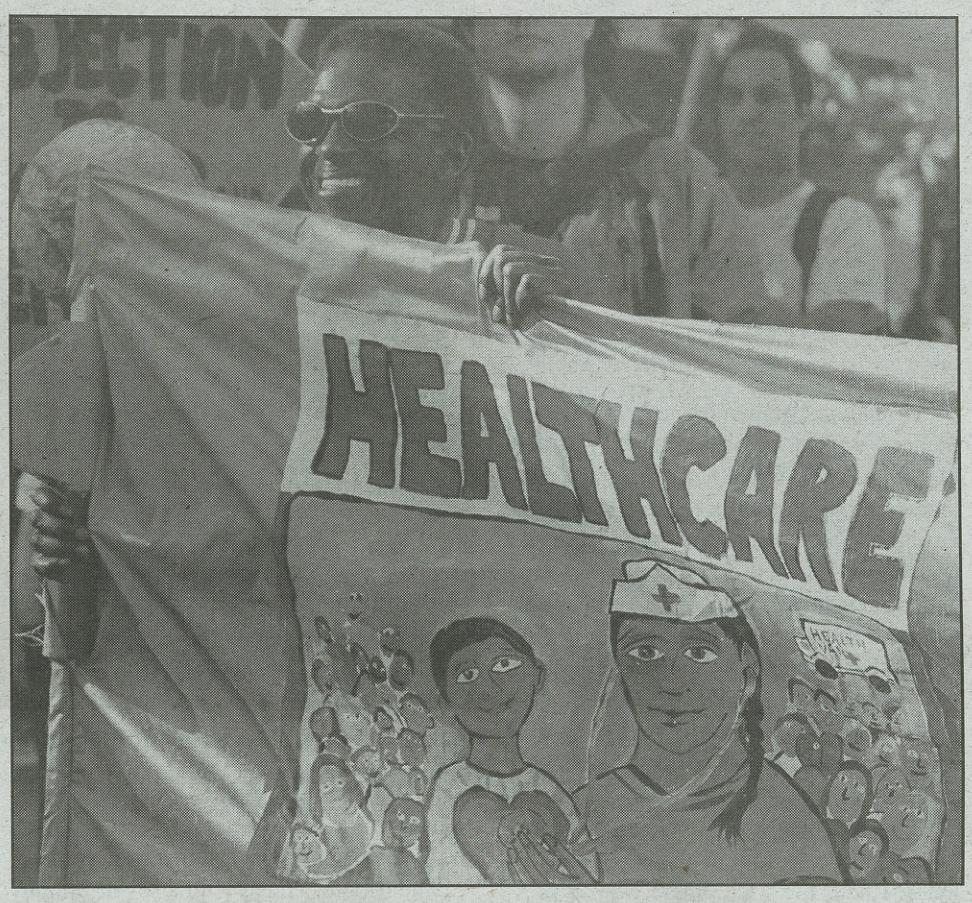
Defenders of the current healthcare legislation don't like to acknowledge how thoroughly corporate it is. In the wake of the Senate election in Massachusetts, we're sure to see a new wave of mass e-mails from progressive groups urging a renewed fight for a public option. But the Obama administration threw a public option under the Pennsylvania Avenue bus well before the GOP victory in Massachusetts finalized its burial.

Key provisions — such as a mandate requiring individuals to buy private health insurance without a public option — are giveaways to mega-corporations on a scale so vast that it boggles the mind. Such a federal healthcare law — massively combining an intrusive government mandate with corporate power — would be a godsend to right-wing populism for decades.

Government power should be used for the common good, not for humongous profiteering. But on the near horizon is a law that would further bloat already-bloated corporate coffers while undermining basic precepts of a social compact.

The mandate places legal, financial and ideological burdens on the individual for healthcare. In the process, at best, many low-income people would only have access to inferior coverage with plenty of holes.

Rather than affirm the principle of healthcare as a human right, the current scenarios for healthcare reform lay out limited federal subsidies for private insurance premiums — in effect, an entitlement program in political terms, sure to be vulnerable to the kind of safety-net shredding that has done so much harm in recent decades.



Despite paralysis and inaction in the White House and Congress, the people still want health care for all, as shown by this Oakland march. Tom Lowe photo

The current versions of healthcare reform, as *New York Times* economics writer David Leonhardt noted on Jan. 20, "are more conservative than Bill Clinton's 1993 proposal. For that matter, they're more conservative than Richard Nixon's 1971 plan, which would have had the federal government provide insurance to people who didn't get it through their job."

One of the biggest themes — repeated endlessly by pundits and meme-prone Democrats — has been the assertion that getting "healthcare reform" signed into law is essential for the political viability of a Democratic Congress and the Obama presidency. But at this point, given what's on the table under the Capitol Dome, the opposite is likely to be the case.

If Obama signs the kind of healthcare legislation now in the pipeline, it will be a political gift to the Republicans — and a crowning negative achievement of bad leadership for the congressional majority.

Key House Democrats declared throughout most of 2009 that they would only support a healthcare reform bill with a "robust" public option. Now the same members of Congress are saying they'll be pleased to vote for a final bill with no public option at all.

Meanwhile, at the grassroots, many progressives are apt to buy into a false choice between capitulating inside the Democratic Party or staying away from it. But there's another option: an inside/outside strategy that involves openly fighting for progressive power within the party while also organizing outside of it.

If we want more progressive officeholders, then elections are part of the process: beginning with Democratic primaries this year. Support genuine progressive candidates — and if you don't see any, maybe you should do some recruiting. There's no time to lose.

Norman Solomon is national co-chair of the Healthcare NOT Warfare campaign. His books include *Made Love, Got War: Close Encounters with America's Warfare State*.

"Unbearable"

by George Wynn

You see the edge
in the sleepless eyes
of the huddled and blanketed
You see the pervading
thought "Why all
this damn waiting
and waiting...
forever waiting
for the housing we've
sought for so damn long?"

You don't have to
be a sociologist to know
if the rich would
sleep one night
in a Tenderloin alley
they would scream, "Unbearable"
as Prince William
did on the streets
of London.

Jefferson Park Blues

by George Wynn

It was dark
all afternoon
in Jefferson Park
It was raining
And it was going to hail
The homeless sergeant
sat under a tree
reading his mail:
Social Security
Disability denied.

Dorothea Lange Faces

by George Wynn

Up and down
Main Street U.S.A
you see 50-year-
old women with
Dorothea Lange faces
sleep walking from
one fast food
restaurant to
another staring
at hot and cold
food in silence
afraid of being
scolded ...
shyly asking
for samples
hoping someone
will dish out
some tenderness.

It's bad and
stark times
and it's gonna
get worse
and nobody's
on the radio
giving a
fireside chat.

Toasty Blanket

by Sue Ellen Pector

Some folks don't know,
others, bitter, know too well —
aching roaring steaming.
No jobs to spare
for the unsuitable, unwelcome
other.

Fit in or die
says American democracy
hidden deep beneath her toasty blanket
of classlessness equality justice…
for whom?

New Mailing Address

Street Spirit
AFSC
65 Ninth Street,
San Francisco, CA 94103

Street Spirit

Street Spirit is published by **American Friends Service Committee.** The vendor program is run by **BOSS (Building Opportunities for Self-Sufficiency).**

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Street Spirit welcomes submissions of articles, poems, photos and art, but cannot guarantee they will be published.

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A Sweet Farewell To The "Man Offbeat"

Rhett exuded pure, unconditional caring and love in a way that most of us only aspire to and will sorely miss.

by Kitty Costello

A memorial gathering was held for poet Rhett Stuart on January 9 at the Hospitality House in San Francisco, bringing together friends from San Francisco, as well as one old friend who knew him since early childhood back in the 1940s in Newport News, Virginia; his nieces, grandnieces and other family; fellow poets, artists and musicians; and some who had met Rhett 20-some years ago in that very spot at Hospitality House.

A reading from "On the Economy of the Dead" by John Berger brought to mind how Rhett, when alive, crossed easily from this world into the world of those long gone, then back again.

A moving rendition of one of Rhett's favorite songs, "Where or When" by Rodgers and Hart, made certain that from the start there was not a dry eye or a closed heart in the house, just the way Rhett would have liked it. The lyrics evoked the mystery of feeling we've been here before, the permeability of the veil between present and past, between the waking world and the world of dreams.

In readings, remembrances and performances, a picture emerged of Rhett Stuart, the "Man Offbeat." Rhett, who could tell and retell his story back to the age of 3 and never be a bore. Rhett, who hated to work a regular job, but relished his creative work and that of others with reverent devotion. Rhett, who interviewed potential bosses rather than the other way around. Rhett, who would have appetizers at one restaurant, soup at another, then dessert at his favorite pie shop, a lunch that took hours in a five-mile, round-trip stroll.

Rhett, the pianist and singer, who shared in his mother's love of music, of show tunes. Rhett, the wise oracle, whose presence could be sensed, leaning there against a pillar by the stage. Rhett, who mailed his poems, like love letters, to so many of us. Rhett, whose poetry was lovely to hear, to let wash over you, but could be perplexing to understand on the page.

Rhett, who had class, even when donning an ensemble of tie, ball cap and tennis shoes. Rhett, who turned not-fitting-in into an art form, and whose very being gave others comfort and permission to embrace their own way of being "offbeat." Rhett, who exuded pure, unconditional caring and love in a way that most of us only aspire to and will sorely miss.



Kitty Costello, a close friend of Rhett Stuart, attends his memorial. Jess Clarke photo

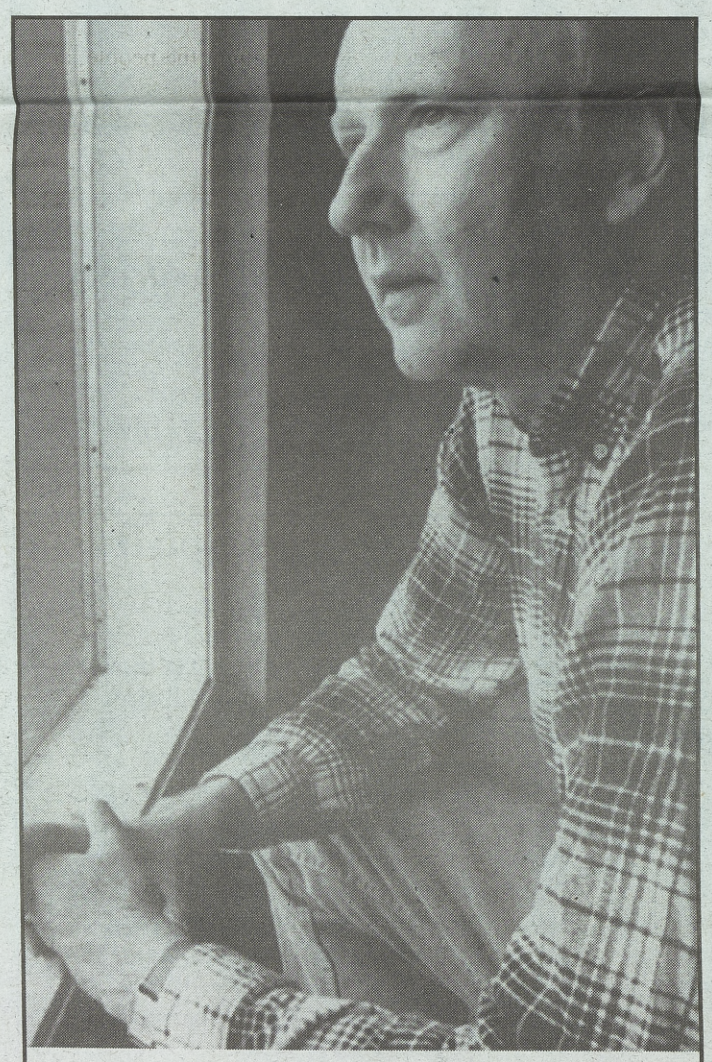
The tributes ended with a seven-minute Quaker-style meditation, with encouragement to speak when the spirit moved you, followed by a plaintive, Irish tune, played by his grandniece on violin.

Copies of his book, *Man Offbeat,* were offered by his publisher, Freedom Voices, to everyone who attended, as well as a memorial booklet, compiled from eulogies posted on their website, and a selection of Rhett's poems. Some of Rhett's small poems were gathered, framed and hung on the wall. Books from his bookshelves were offered in a giveaway, with plenty of novels, philosophy and poetry for all.

In the storefront window of Hospitality House was a tribute to his life, gathered from his possessions left behind — his paintings, a life-sized photo, desk and typewriter, his books.

And to top it all off, a "free lunch," including some of Rhett's favorite foods, prepared by a friend — chicken-and-white-bean chili, corn muffins with rosemary, herbed squash, apple strudel.

A deeply nourishing feast for mind, palate, belly and soul, as we wished a sweet farewell to the "Man Offbeat."



A contemplative mood: Rhett Stuart gazes out his window.

Where or When

by Richard Rodgers and Lorenz Hart

"And so it seems that we have met before
and laughed before
and loved before,
But who knows where or when."

"Often I think of the beautiful town
That is seated by the sea;
Often in thought go up and down
The pleasant streets of that dear old town,
And my youth comes back to me."
—Henry Wadsworth Longfellow

For Street Spirit: How To Start Off A Millennium Morning

by Rhett Stuart

(Author's note: All at once I wonder if I was not put here to help us live. I'm on our side. All are simultaneous students and teachers.)

HMO prices rise on every minute aspect
of their planned-out procedures
Your rent, your bank
feel as though they cheat you, yes
Just pay it as long as you can only
fight it, fruitless
You can't save this money
but can save own sweat,
own slowed-down heartbeat
Divorce 'em
They can't have your heart, soul nor sweat
Never even listen to "offers" over the phone
None are offers
Instantly say no to anything "offered,"
much less, solicited
(That will be hidden, anyway – at
any cost – to
you) Rip mail bribe in two at first crack
There is nothing free
other than "the best things in life,"
sun and sunflowers,
starfish and stars,
dogwood, dogs
Make up own list
Hand it out
Spirited streets listen

Perverse Preferences

by Rhett Stuart

Liked not having money.
When New York City natives
rude to me I liked that too.
Carrying no briefcase, wearing no tie,
unowned by car or credit card
are things I most liked,
keeping it simple, abstaining
that which would land me
fortune's vast debt.

THE TRAGIC

by Rhett Stuart

It is a tragedy when people face tragedy,
when a pet's heart breaks lost from its loved person,
when one solitary leaf breaks before its time felt
hearty in the sun,
ant crushed when polishing off hill
or while roused in funeral for sister or brother,
when bird, country or city, injured,
calf raised for slaughter when as sustenance,
not so good for consumption anyway.
Why must some delude selves their tragedies
matter more than oil in fish sea?
Do you believe it no matter to breathing wave and rock?
Are you nature?
Or delude self, more lofty?
You are lofty, because of nature.
It is nature that includes you so in
all, living!
And yes,
should insensitivity and cruelty feel not, this union,
it is so, that you be most tragic and pathetic of species.
God, no bigot placing you ahead of creation.
God no bigot,
like diocese boasting scripture that
gay marriage but contract, but contact.
Suddenly moved by blissful gay paired faces,
exuded too from past heartbreaking.
Creation hath no rating system.
Must advise church, God no bigot.
Cease Her/His misquotes off but writers like me
so far back in time.
Let Him/Her bypass pastor and speak now to your heart!
Brain given for thinking for self, but
up from HEART, for truth.
Meanwhile, let bird sing it.
You believe you sing better than bird?
You sing, because of bird!
You think your pain worse than half-crushed ant?
No, no more than sliced fresh grass blade, yearning
too for first light.
Logistics, Friend,
logic, relativity, one Oneness with no cutoff.
And if not buying this, ask Thoreau
or Schweitzer, or the other Albert, Einstein —
I don't care — ask kindly Jimmy Durante! Me!

Remembering Rhett

Rhett was all about love. He hugged us not only with his enveloping arms but also with his beautiful, wise words.

by Eric Robertson

We celebrate the life of Rhett Stuart, a man who was loved as much as he loved. Rhett was all about love. He hugged us not only with his long, enveloping arms but also with his beautiful, wise words.

Rhett sent his writing to my partner Leah and I on a regular basis. Every few weeks a poem or two would arrive in the mail. Over the years, I got better at reading Rhett's poetry. I always enjoyed hearing him read his work because I could just listen to the deep, mellifluous stream of his voice and be taken to a comfortable place.

But reading it to myself was often a challenge. I'd get uptight and say to myself, "What the heck is he trying to say?" "What does this mean?" I'd find myself backing up, looking for clues like I was reading a Charles Dickens novel instead of a one-page poem. It took me a while to figure out.

His poems are all about letting go. I had to do away with my notions of common syntax, and just let the read words wash over me like a stream. Rhett was an expert at combining two thoughts into a few words. I just had to cut the string and let myself fall in. I finally learned to do that.

Through his writing, Rhett's life was an ongoing dream memory. But he was a great conversationalist too. I marveled at his stories, often just short anecdotes — like the time he decided to throw a party and was getting worried about what to do. A friend said, "Just get a cake and a big jug of wine." To me, a young follower of the San Francisco bohemian tradition, Rhett's life was an affirmation that you really can live on peanuts.

Rhett did not dwell in the past. He swam in it. It was an ocean and a river that took him to the present, then back to past and then present in an ever ebb that showed him how to live here. And it helped the people he knew and loved, know how to live too.

He was a philosopher and somewhat of a riddle. Rhett didn't believe in giving advice, but he gave great advice. He said, "You are not your past," but he seemed to swim in his own effortlessly. Rhett related that, as a young man, he did a lot of needless worrying. His anecdotes of his foibles and follies were medicine to me, being an inveterate worrier myself.

When he was working for P and O Cruise lines, he took advantage of one of the free tickets that came with the job, but lost his return ticket somewhere along the way. His friends assured him that everything would be all right, but he couldn't get his mind off it. Occupied by his worries, he stood at the ship's rail, overlooking an incredible Caribbean sunset. Standing next to him, his friend asked in a deadpan voice, "How's the view of that ticket?"

Mechanically disinclined, Rhett told the story of being unable to start his car one day. Frustrated, he said, "You can have it if you want," to a passerby. "Gee, thanks," the guy said. He immediately opened the hood, fooled around, then started up the car and drove away.

Rhett believed in letting and trusting. If he had a problem weighing on his mind, he believed in asking the universe, and then waiting. He called this putting it in his servomechanism. He knew that the universe has answers; but that it isn't on speed dial and sometimes you have to wait for a call back. And some questions never got answered — usually the ones having to do with landlords or the utility company.

But the universe generally gave him a call back. Sometimes it came in the form of sunshine hitting his window a certain way. He was open to answers in different forms and didn't need things spelled out. He advocated letting oneself feel what we felt and not trying to force a change. He gathered and cast away, always keeping the things he loved.



Eric Robertson delivers a eulogy at Rhett Stuart's memorial. Jess Clarke photo

I didn't realize how much Rhett had illustrated his life for me until he died. He did this with his poetry and his music and his amazing friendship — and of course, the literal pictures he drew.

Our friend Jesse says, "Rhett didn't leave this world to experience the other world. He was a frequent host to visitors here." Rhett brought the people, alive and past into the present to help him live, just as Rhett will help us live with compassion and dignity and courage in the present moment we have now.

In Rhett's last poem sent to Leah and I, he says,

"Love is friendship-past plus friendship-now.

LOVE IS FRIENDSHIP-PAST PLUS FRIENDSHIP-NOW IS LOVE."

Sing a Song All the While

Rhett spent his life seeking music, beauty and the friendship of artists. Happiness.

by Alice Gould

The surprising thing is how well Rhett could convey the story of his entire person since age 3 without being a complete bore. And could not do otherwise. I've never met someone so in touch with his memories in such vivid detail as to practically relive them daily through conversation or writing. But I guess great writers can do that.

If I close my eyes and envision myself touching Rhett's hand, I am reeled through images from over seven decades — half of which I was not alive to witness, but nevertheless feel and see perfectly.

As if I had been his omniscient soul in Munich when he pulled out his writing tablet in the small upstairs attic which he found to be romantic. I get excited about our jaunt down 42nd Street the first time Rhett discovers it; or when we wander into afternoon shows on or off Broadway; or meet Dee for a drink.

We're leaning out the window of his brownstone just to see what it looks like here, now. Then rushing to the mirror to record the look on Rhett's face. just to see what happiness looks like on Rhett, he used to say. Then daydreaming for a minute or an hour about the James River, the ships going in and out of the sunset-lit harbor; me, us, crouched in the grass along the shore or running to greet the familiar soldiers stationed in Newport News.

I have my own layout of the town and travel it internally by air or street cam — from Rhett's big house and yard, friend Betty's car parked in the drive, Kelly yapping behind me, spitting image of Lassie, down the blocks to the theater and afterward to grandma's for grape juice in cut glass on ice and later roasted chicken drizzled with lemon. Oh she spoiled us, Rhett would say.

His bosses are behind desks glaring at us as Rhett sits comfortably in the hot seat, disinterested. We didn't get the job, yeah!

Out on the street again to look, wander, see and find something. To smile at people, or languish at distraught tree branches thoughtlessly chopped by city workers obviously not sensing the soul in every leaf. To sing a song all the while, seeking music, beauty, and friendship of artists.



Alice Gould stands outside the front windows at Hospitality House which showcased books, paintings and art from Rhett Stuart's life. Jess Clarke photo

Now we're gonna jump on a train for the weekend to see mom and sing beside her on the piano. Or now, when the piano teacher leaves the room, we dash to the bench and lay out a jumpy tune to the laughs of Rhett's classmates.

Fast forward to now. We're in Rhett's apartment on Hayes Street in San Francisco. It's morning. We've got our instant coffee that needs no apology. A solid ray of sunshine splits through the window to land upon a treasured rock collected in Big Sur, as another one spins a rainbow on the opposite wall, while Elliot the angelic, ageless cat purrs at our side. Calmly, slowly, rise, to the mirror to record the face of this feeling. Happiness.

Facing the Challenges of the Dually Diagnosed

by Maureen Hartmann



John Elford, residential coordinator at Bonita House, a Berkeley-based residential treatment center. Lydia Gans photo

Homeless people with a dual diagnosis face a triple threat that poses three interrelated obstacles when they attempt to find housing and stabilize their lives. Not only must they contend with homelessness, but they also struggle simultaneously with crushingly difficult substance abuse and mental health problems.

The Berkeley-based Bonita House residential treatment program attempts to bring healing and newfound hope to dually diagnosed people who try to overcome homelessness, even as they struggle with intractable mental health issues plus substance abuse problems.

In one recent example of recovery, a 45-year-old man graduated from the Bonita House residential treatment program more than a year ago, after being in the dual diagnosis program for ten months. At present, he's still case-managed in Alameda County, but he has improved so much that he has been able to do volunteer work in a health-related company. The company recently employed him in a 15-hour-a-week job.

"He's been able to make that transition, although he'll probably always receive his SSI benefits," said John Elford, residential coordinator at Bonita House. "So he'll be able to add to his income."

In another hopeful example of recovery, a woman with a grown daughter completed 12 months at Bonita House, according to Elford. Before she came to Bonita House, she was homeless or living with her relatives intermittently. She kept coming back to the family home, borrowing money, not paying it back, and, in general, disrupting peoples' lives.

While she was homeless, she regretted that she was separated from her daughter and this sadness motivated her to accept treatment.

Elford said, "While she was here, the counselor who was working with this client involved the family fairly early on in the treatment process and as the family got ready to transition out, the family became more and more supportive.

"She was able to be reunited with her sisters and her adult child and to re-establish a relationship with her and was able to now live independently, and not be dependent on her family for housing. She is able to be part of the family again and really bring joy back into her life and to her daughter's and her sisters' lives."

Elford noted that their main follow-up with graduates of the program is through summer barbecues and the annual Halloween party to which alumni are invited. Elford learns from this contact with graduates that, "Some people are able to return to the work force. Many people are able to lead productive lives at some sort of minimum."

He gave a typical example of how family participation came about in the process of getting the client into treatment.

"A typical case would be somebody who's lived at home, but is off of meds and using drugs," Elford said. "He/she becomes violent and causes the police to be called. Many times, the family has to become involved in getting treatment and getting stay-away orders. At the same time, the same family member will come and visit a person here to help repair the relationship.

"That has happened, but generally, for people in recovery, one of the things they realize is that this is something that they are going to be involved in for the rest of their lives, and that family is very important. Because having support — having people that can help you stay clean and sober and help you manage the activities of daily living — is necessary. That's where family is usually the best solution."

Through what kinds of treatment and activities do client-residents get to the stage of recovery? One approach is the twelve-step program, about which Elford and the director of the program, Dr. Maria Sadeghi, who has her doctorate in clinical psychology and is a former professor, are ambiguous. Elford has reservations about the spirituality of the twelve steps. He is convinced the steps create conflict between the staff and the clients, because they think that the staff is trying to promote some kind of religion to them.

Also, Elford and the program director feel that the twelve-step programs promote the idea that drug use is a disease that is not the fault of the user. The staff at Bonita House does not require that clients attend Alcoholics Anonymous, Narcotics Anonymous, and Dual Diagnosis Anonymous groups. They only mildly suggest that the clients attend.

Elford noted that the twelve-step groups at the house are H. and I. (Hospitals and Institutions). That is, according to the recommendations of the groups, for a mental health institution such as Bonita House, the meetings are not peer-led, but led by someone coming in from the outside. The dual-recovery group is an exception; it is peer-led.

There are also anger-management groups in the house. These encourage clients to discover what triggered the anger, and to find methods of calming down such as deep breathing.

Within the house, psychotherapy is not used as a method of treatment. Many of the staff are licensed therapists, but they counsel the clients rather than offer them psychotherapy. Counseling, as I understand it from talking to Elford, involves teaching clients coping skills with their emotions, managing their mental-health symptoms, learning new behaviors to replace the old.

"We feel that it is important for people to recognize that their learned behaviors have created the problems, and to realize that to give up old behaviors and learn new ones is more healthy and wellness-related and gives more power to the clients," Elford said. "Our groups are really to help give counseling and guidance and psycho-education to people about how to manage their urges to use drugs."

Counseling on the part of the staff does involve "a lot of work around how to prevent relapsing on substances," Elford said. "And that can be a really complex kind of thing, everything from your diet and exercise to increasing your ability to understand that you're going to be tempted to use, to understand what you can do in that moment to keep from going out and using, or if you do use, how can you stop yourself early.

"So we help people go back and relive — which can be truly traumatic. We help people to go back and look at the timeline of what went on in the decision to buy crack cocaine and to use that crack cocaine. Usually there's a lot of stuff that leads up to that decision. This happens with boredom, sitting around the house, doing nothing, not following up on meetings, not seeing your therapist, not taking prescribed medicine, withdrawing."

Clients are strongly encouraged to have their own psychiatrist or psychologist. Most of the clients have a psychiatrist whom they see monthly; a few of the clients have a psychologist. The staff tries to help the clients function so that they can interact successfully with a psychiatrist, a psychologist, or a nurse. Bonita House also has "a psychiatrist, a medical director who comes once a week to do group," said Elford.

Part of the Bonita House program is recreation. Along with the previously mentioned summer barbecues and Halloween party, there are outings to the bowling alley and movies, and various free events, including a trip to Laney College this last November to be part of a Native American powwow.

"We take clients out to go down to the Berkeley Marina, to walk on the pier a lot," Elford said. "They love that. And then we got Tilden Park right here. We can go to the Rose Garden at any time and take a walk up there. There's Inspiration Point."

Bonita House has also improved its upstairs gym, including an interactive videogame where people get up and move around the room to play tennis and bowling games.

"It really gets people up off the couch and gets people engaged in light physical activity," Elford said. "We require people to go on a walk five days a week, and we take a twenty-minute walk everyday. Many of the people can't use the gym for some reason, whereas walking brings the heart rate up a bit."

Finally, there is the adjustment period in transitioning out of the program. If residents stay for as long as six months, they may start a part-time job in the last month.

"They might start back to school and take one class for a quarter, in the last two or three months here," Elford said. "Most of the people that come through here will probably remain on disability most of their lives. But a good percentage, probably more than 30 percent, will be able to go back to school, to go back to work."

Clients are recruited for the program partly through referrals, phone calls and their website. "The county has a case management team, and hospitals and outpatient clinics are apprised of people that are available within the county," Elford said. Bonita House also has a contract with Kaiser, and they get a lot of calls from family members who want to find out how to enter the program.

There is strong interaction with regard to referrals between the dual diagnosis residential program of Bonita House and the other three programs of Bonita House: the Creative Living Center, Supported Independent Living (profiled in the December 2009 issue of *Street Spirit*), and the Homeless Outreach and Stabilization Team (HOST).

Elford describes the Creative Living Center as a "wonderful out-patient organization." Among other therapies, it provides a excellent and varied writing and art therapies. He said, "We'll have clients in their last month, who are transitioning out of the program, go over to the Creative Living Center. We do this on Mondays and Fridays, to get them to have activities outside of our house. That's going to be what they are doing outside when they go into supported living. We want them to have a day program, something to keep them busy, something that's interesting."

Elford added, "We refer a fairly high percentage of our county clients to our own Supported Independent Living program. It's by far the most extensive in the county. SIL provides housing and case management."

The dual diagnosis program also gets referrals from HOST, a Bonita House pro-

See **Dual Diagnosis** *page 7*

Devastating Cuts Cause Great Suffering to the Disabled

The severe cuts in lifeline benefits haven't eliminated waste. Rather, they have deprived thousands of the basics that allow a life without extreme suffering.



Art by Christa Occhiogrosso

by Jack Bragen

In a modern country like the United States, it is within our means to care for and protect those adults and children who have disabilities and who, for medical and other reasons, aren't strong enough to keep up with the pace of the rest of society. In America, however, the highest priority is not ensuring the health and well-being of disabled people.

Instead, the main concern is to save money for the government at all times. Apparently, another priority in the care system is preventing those in this classification from having upward mobility. This is achieved through a system that penalizes our attempts to move out of poverty.

The architects of the system apparently feel that it would be a nuisance if the disabled were able to afford eating at the same restaurant as they, or going to the same country club. The affluent people who designed the system would like to have those at the bottom stay at the bottom.

The current objective of our system seems to be providing the least care allowable. In this model, saving money is valued far more highly than the prevention of human suffering. Although conditions are better here than in many impoverished or totalitarian countries, the suffering and the economic oppression are real and are not a figment of the imagination.

The last two years have brought exceptionally bad news for disabled people who rely on a check and/or medical benefits through the State of California and the federal government. Shockingly devastating cuts have been made. Disabled people all over California are now suffering as a result of these cutbacks in benefits.

To begin with, SSI benefits were cut by the State of California by huge amounts for three months in a row at the end of last year. We're talking about total cuts of well over $100 per month for people whose total income may be less than $800 to begin with.

Secondly, the federal government didn't provide a cost-of-living increase in our checks this year. These cost-of-living increases have perennially been a source of hope for those who don't get much.

But this is where it really gets cruel and inhuman: Dental and eye care benefits under the MediCal program have been eliminated. The only exception to this is for pulling teeth. I remind the reader that a person must pass a vision test in order to get a California Driver's License. If a nearsighted person can't afford to pay for their glasses, they could soon lose the ability to drive, and this could prevent earning money to live on. This is an obstacle in ending people's reliance on the system for support.

During a routine eye exam, testing happens for glaucoma and other eye diseases that can make a person go blind. Under our new plan, such eye exams by optometrists are no longer taking place.

If someone on these benefits isn't blessed with perfect teeth, at some point a dentist will be needed. There is no way of paying for a dentist while living on a low income unless there is outside help. Numerous citizens don't have such help.

If, at some point, the person's teeth are pulled, this too is a barrier against upward mobility. A company isn't as likely to hire a toothless woman as a receptionist, and such a supposedly cosmetic problem is equivalent to being disfigured — with all of the stigma and bad treatment that are included in that package. Lack of dental care can also cause potentially fatal conditions such as heart attack.

I want to bring up a mistake that was made in my and my wife's drug coverage in January. When we went to the pharmacy, we were shocked at a price of over four hundred dollars to pick up our medications. This later turned out to be a computer "glitch" and to correct it, it required phoning the insurance company and answering some questions, after being on hold for about an hour.

This is the sort of thing that causes some of the most vulnerable people to just give up. It was only my insistence that a mistake had been made, coupled with my persistence in repeatedly asking to speak to the supervisor of the clerk, that allowed me to finally get routed to the right person who could correct this glitch. Imagine the amount of money the insurance company might have made by having such a glitch!

The severe cuts in benefits haven't eliminated waste. Rather, they have deprived thousands of people of the basics that allow a life without extreme suffering. They have made a bad situation into a hopeless one. And these cuts aren't needed to save our economy. The money could be found if legislators were interested in being helpful. The economy would be stimulated if those at the bottom of the pyramid could afford the basics. There is no excuse for this injustice.

Dual Diagnosis

from page 6

gram established two years ago to provide services for people in the county who are chronically homeless and had not been receiving mental health services before. "Many of the clients that they get are people that can use our service," said Elford

Bonita House Residence is a licensed mental health facility, and therefore qualifies for Short Doyle funding to pay for the residential terms there. Elford said,"The client will pay their share of cost based on what an SSI recipient receives. We take the majority of that and leave the client $150 a month for incidentals. We provide room and board and treatment and activities. That is only about 15 percent of the total cost. The rest is picked up by the federal, state, and county governments."

Like other organizations of its kind, Bonita House's dual diagnosis program is going through some tough times, economically speaking. "We've had to expand the number of privately insured people that we bring in," Elford explained. "It would be great if the county could find more funds to put more people here. There is a need. Bonita House and the other three or four residential treatment programs for dual diagnosis in the Bay Area are all full with waiting lists."

The future of the field of dual diagnosis is promising, according to Elford. When he was in school, he read that 70 percent of the people with chronic mental illness had a substance abuse issue; while 56 percent of people with substance abuse addictions had emotional problems.

"The writing was on the wall for decades before the medical establishment realized that we needed to treat these together," he said. "The medical community in general through the 1990s and beginning in the decade that's ending now began to recognize that co-occurring disorders were so prevalent. I feel like we are very much in a field that is just beginning and just growing. There is now in medical schools an opportunity for doctors to get a specialty in substance abuse. With that comes an increased understanding of people with substance abuse."

The problems that dual diagnosis creates are both rough and difficult, and challenging and exciting, because of the undiscovered lessons to be learned about the human psyche, and the possibility of making new advances. Bonita House dual diagnosis program is today in the midst of these advances.

The dual diagnosis treatment residence of Bonita House needs private donations. If you wish to contribute by mail, send checks earmarked for "Dual Diagnosis Residential Treatment" to: Rick Christino-Executive Director, 6333 Telegraph St. Ste 102, Oakland CA 94609. To donate by credit card to Bonita House, Inc., go to the website, Bonita House.org and click on "Donate Now through Network for Good." To apply for services, call (510) 526-4765.

Federal Stimulus

from page 2

smokescreen charges of flakey-petition-signing and swear-words, he took a dangerous step back from the goal Jones had championed: targeting the new "green jobs" for the urban poor.

A fair jobs policy would not have to explicitly spell out race-equity. Literal racial quotas might be controversial enough to kill a bill. But as the 2009 "Put America to Work Act" proposed, it could require the government to target job-creation spending to communities with the highest unemployment rates, or to the workers who have been jobless for the longest time.

President Obama has acknowledged the existence of structural racism. He knows that poor people of color face additional obstacles that poor whites don't have to deal with.

But when he told the CBC that all he "can do for the African-American community is the same thing [he] can do for the American community, period," he was operating as if he believed the tired, old, color-blind myth that general anti-poverty programs will reach every group in need. Only by affirmatively targeting the communities pushed backwards by historic racial injustice will recovery efforts reach everyone.

Ajamu Dillahunt, co-author of "The State of the Dream 2010: Drained, Jobless and Foreclosed in Communities of Color," is a board member of United for a Fair Economy.

WHAT HAPPENED

by Claire J. Baker

Over the years as we
walked in the park
two herons graced the trees,
waded the creek for food,
flew to a nest or grassy den.
These days when we walk,
talk of Haiti's disaster amid
insufficient housing all over
the world, we wonder
what happened: now only one
heron remains to forge
for daily needs.

THE POET

by George Wynn

He, really strong,
trusts his pen
for equanimity.
Abandoned by
family, community,
he spends long
days and nights
on harsh streets
unstained by marsh
of bitterness.

OMISSION

by Claire J. Baker

In a prestigious poetry journal
not one poem for, to, about
the homeless: one homeless boy,
girl, man, woman, dog, cat.

This poet asks: what's with that?
Not coy nor out of commission
I conclude with a shout:
EGREGIOUS OMISSION!



Artists Christine Hanlon and Doug Minkler at the January 20 march for justice.



Paul Boden, director of Western Regional Advocacy Project, exhorts the marchers.

March for Justice

from page 1



Sara Shortt, executive director of the Housing Rights Committee, marches in downtown San Francisco. All photos by Carol Harvey

merging inevitably into the homeless, impoverished underclass.

All across the nation, underpaid workers are paid criminally low wages for back-breaking work that prevents them from being able to afford inflated rents. Why then, the marchers ask, do the powers that be direct the police to criminalize and jail homeless people for the "quality of life crime" of being forced by poverty to sleep on the street? It is a human right to sleep — everyone has that right, homeless or not. It is a crime to deny that right to millions of people in America.

One of the most significant points made by the marchers during the demonstration on January 20, was that poverty is not caused by the faults of the poor — a slander repeated endlessly by the corporate media, municipal politicians, police, rightwing academics, and by social workers paid to "fix" the "flaws" of the poor.

Poverty and homelessness are the inevitable outcomes of a system of corporate capitalism that is fueled by out-of-control greed and competition. This unregulated free-market system is unmitigated by compassion or cooperation, and it refuses to accept any responsibility for the millions of human beings who are left jobless, hungry and homeless by this system — people who may work in boom times, but in bust times are pushed to the margins as useless for work.

In San Francisco it is all so clear — the wages of workers cannot keep up with soaring rents. Free markets generate soaring prices, and lower-paying jobs don't meet the rent. This forces millions of people into poverty and homelessness. In this lethally unjust structure, the monied few continually crush down the impoverished many to maintain domination and control.

Peter Marcuse analyzed the nature of homelessness in American society in an influential essay written in the mid-1980s, just as widespread homelessness was re-emerging as a massive societal problem in numbers unseen since the Great Depression. In his article "Neutralizing Homelessness," in the *Socialist Review,* Marcuse placed systemic structural flaws at the problem's center.

He focused on three related causes of homelessness in the housing, economic, and governmental systems, and then described his proposed cures.

1. The *housing system* supplies housing for profit.

The Cure: "Uncouple the housing system from the rest of the private market system and make it respond to need."

2. The *economic system* leads to an unjust distribution of income, just as deindustrialization brought about an unjust distribution of jobs. Marcuse wrote, "Changes in the economy have deprived many people of the income with which to pay for housing." Since there "is no profit in supplying housing for those now homeless," he wrote, a profit-fixated economy treats people as unwanted throw-aways.

The Cure: "Change the economic system so that all have a decent living wage."

3. The *government policy system* refuses to address the growing shortfall in affordable housing by funding essential new housing programs. According to Marcuse, "The government only acts to provide housing for persons unable to pay the market price when the economy may need such people in the future, or when those people threaten the status quo (i.e. protest)."

The Cure: "Government subsidies to provide housing for those who cannot get it through the private market."

The outcome of this system is inevitable — and inhumane. "The formula is simple: when housing is only provided for profit, those who cannot provide others with profit get no housing," Marcuse wrote. People fall into homelessness.

The result is a pattern of "abandonment and gentrification" in cities. The lower classes, too poor to pay rising rents, suffer urban displacement by an upper class with vast wealth. When the capitalist/corporatist profit motive controls the collective sociopolitical subconscious — when, as Reagan wryly observed, "Greed is Good" — human beings become objects, commodities. Human rights are lost.

The marchers asking, "Where's Our Change?" seek to re-democratize the system, re-humanize people and claim "housing as a human right."

In 2007, WRAP published a study entitled, "Without Housing: Decades of Housing Cutbacks, Massive Homelessness and Policy Failures." WRAP member and *Street Root* editor Israel Bayer called it, "a roadmap for policy makers, organizers, homeless and affordable housing service providers, and for social work departments, explaining how modern day homelessness arrived on our doorsteps in America over the last three decades."

The WRAP study was replete with charts showing the connection between decreasing federal subsidies for housing and the nationwide increase in homelessness. Art Hazelwood, a San Francisco artist, converted the charts' lifeless data into beautiful illustrations, placing the precipitous rise of homelessness at 1979.

Boden asserts that the charts show clearly that the outrageous funding cuts to public housing started in 1979 during the Carter recession. "Reagan came in 1980, and from 1980 to 1983, they gutted it," he said.

In the next 25 years, capitalism's structural flaws have intensified, and society's illusions about homelessness are now far more exaggerated. From the 1960s through the '80s, the homeless "stain" spread steadily at the margins. The 1990s and early 2000s shot homelessness supernova.

The middle class began experiencing decline. Urban streets became museums of vast wealth beside savage poverty. In the new American culture of rich versus poor, Berkeley Professor Emmanuel Saez reported that in 2007, the top one-tenth of American earners took in almost 50 percent of total wealth. A class war gathers beyond some fire-lit horizon.

The brilliance of Roosevelt's New Deal was its attempt to stabilize a democracy and secure a middle class which, inevitably, capitalism's structural problems destroyed. Home owners' mortgages held hidden traps vulnerable to Wall Street and bank speculators, faults that eventually dumped families on the streets.

Behind this corporate betting system, Reagan intones his Big Brother homily, "Greed Is Good." Historically, in a capitalist society, the rich cannot exist without the poor. The mortgage collapse and bank bailouts are destroying the middle class, who are now suffering home evictions, and many of them are now vastly expanding the homeless population.

We can weather the coming recession, Honkala believes, only by "knitting together" the grass-roots anti-poverty organizations across the country. In the next two years, as the economy worsens and more families suffer foreclosures, "The only way we're going to get through is if we lean on each other and demand that our government care for its people."

Later in the march, the crowd massed outside the Federal Building while guards escorted eight WRAP coalition representatives from Portland, Los Angeles, Seattle, Philadelphia, San Francisco, and the East Bay, through the building's locked doors to Nancy Pelosi's office.

The group stressed their intent to work with Barack Obama and Speaker Pelosi to make the changes we voted for. They described WRAP's coalition as a rapidly-growing, powerful, smart, West Coast organization addressing the "housing and civil rights abuses against poor people."

Their petition demanded the immediate restoration of "all federal government affordable housing program funding to comparable 1978 allocation levels with an emphasis on HUD's Public Housing and Project-based Section 8, USDA new unit construction and the [one billion dollar, as yet unfunded] National Housing Trust Fund Program" legislation passed in 2008.

The petition further required the government to stop "demolition, conversion, or destruction of any publicly funded units" without "one-for-one replacement at existing affordability rates." It exhorted the Obama administration to "ensure adequate funding for operations of public housing to prevent unit loss, high vacancy rates, and substandard living conditions."

What began with condescension from Pelosi's staff ended with their respectful agreement to approach the "D.C. people" to talk about homeless students' education, anti-homeless policing, and incarceration of mentally ill people. The staff promised to work with WRAP to petition the D.C. office to put together a briefing on homeless people's civil rights concerns.

For Boden, the biggest part of the day was the gathering, artwork, dancing and music the night before, but especially that so many local, state and national people came out in the cold to march respectfully, peacefully and with dignity through San Francisco streets to work for change.